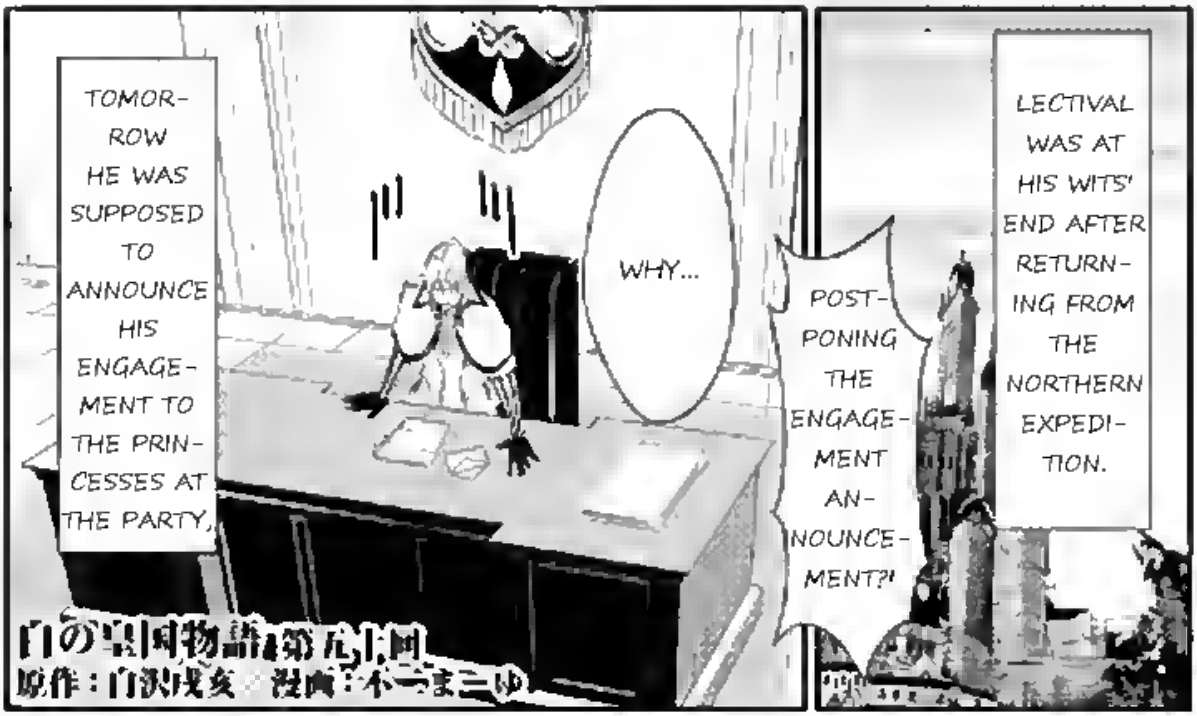
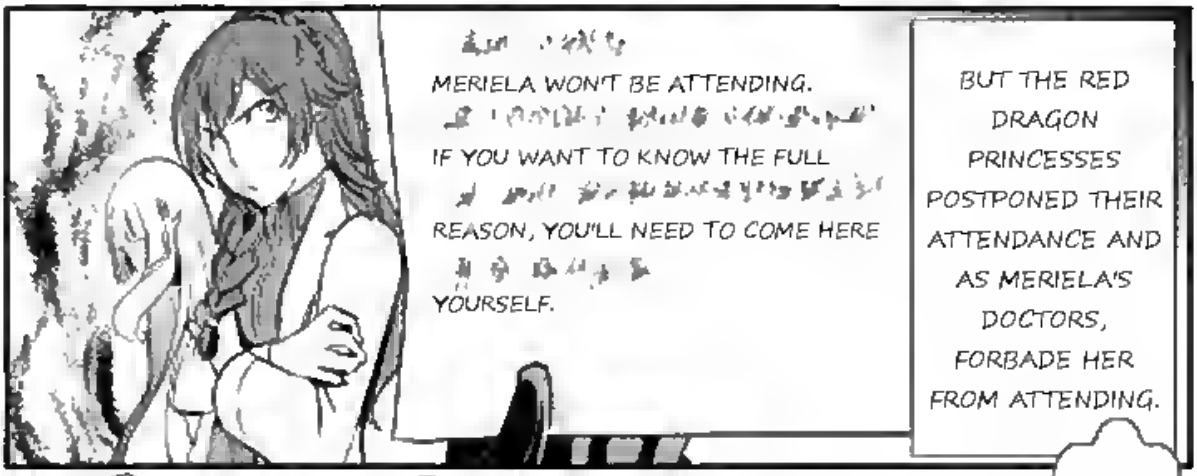

TOMORROW HE WAS SUPPOSED TO ANNOUNCE HIS ENGAGEMENT TO THE PRINCESSES AT THE PARTY,
WHY...
POSTPONING THE ENGAGEMENT ANNOUNCEMENT?!
LECTIVAL WAS AT HIS WITS' END AFTER RETURNING FROM THE NORTHERN EXPEDITION.
白の皇国物語 第五十四回
原作：白沢戌亥　漫画：木つま二ゆ


MERIELA WON'T BE ATTENDING.
IF YOU WANT TO KNOW THE FULL REASON, YOU'LL NEED TO COME HERE YOURSELF.
BUT THE RED DRAGON PRINCESSES POSTPONED THEIR ATTENDANCE AND AS MERIELA'S DOCTORS, FORBADE HER FROM ATTENDING.

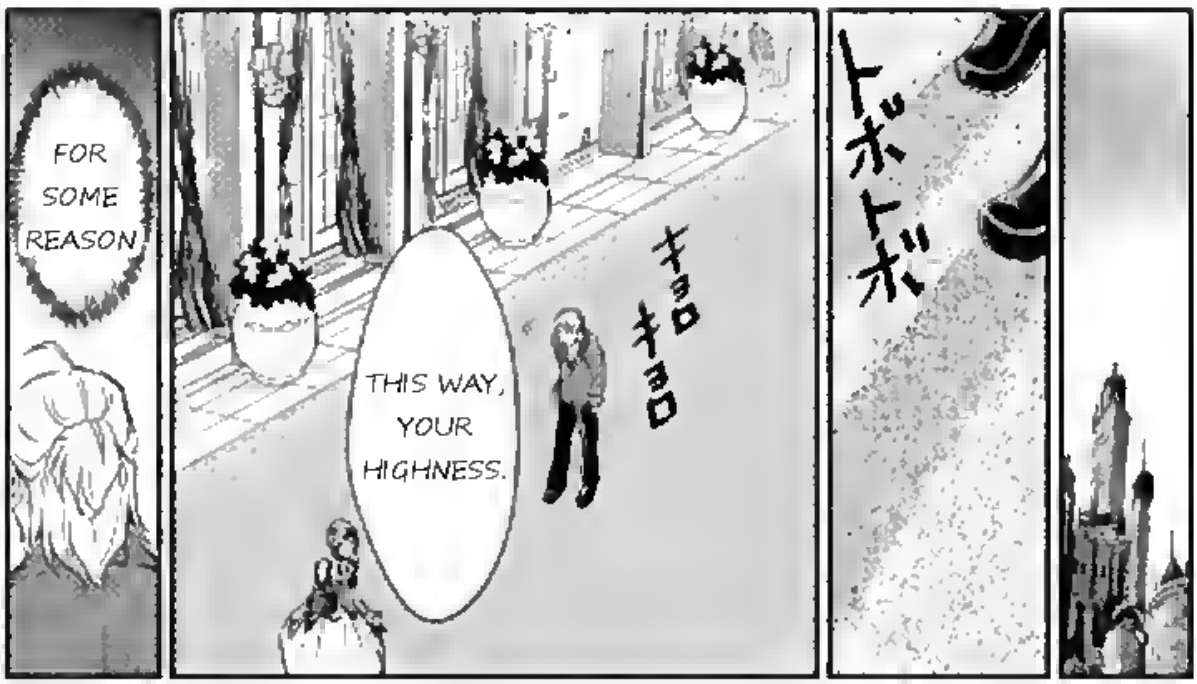
... MAYBE IF I PRETEND I DIDN'T SEE IT... NO, THAT WON'T WORK.
I HAVE A BAD FEELING ABOUT THIS...
WELL THEN... WHAT DID I DO?
MMM!
FERIEL, FARIEL, AND EVEN MERIELA...
FOR SOME REASON I CAN FEEL HER ANGER THROUGH THE LETTER...

I'M SORRY FOR COMING HERE SO LATE.
IT'S FINE,
YOU'RE ALSO ONE OF MASTER LECTIVAL'S FIANCÉES,
THE PREVIOUS NIGHT
SO YOU'LL LIVE HERE SOON ENOUGH AS WELL, MISS FARIEL.
THERE'S NO NEED TO BE SO RESERVED.
NO... TODAY IS...
JUST THINKING ABOUT BEING HIS FIANCÉE,
I START HEARING...
MISS FARIEL?
ARE YOU ALRIGHT?
AHEM
I CAME HERE TODAY TO ASK A FAVOR OF YOU MISS LILICIA
I WISH TO SPEAK WITH YOU AS THE FIRST PRINCESS OF THE INNER PALACE...

IT'S BEEN A WHILE SINCE THE CONFLICT WITH THE EMPIRE ENDED, BUT MERIELA'S CONDITION HAS YET TO IMPROVE.
WHICH IS STRANGE GIVEN THE REGENERATIVE ABILITIES OF DRAGONS.
YOU SEE,
WE'VE INVESTIGATED IT SEVERAL TIMES,
THINKING THAT PERHAPS THAT DRAGON SLAYER GLORIE HAS SOME SPECIAL ABILITY.
AND MY SISTER AND I THOUGHT OF A THEORY.
WHAT IS IT?
THE CAUSE FOR MERIELA'S CONDITION IS...

PSYCHOLOGICAL
IN NATURE.
PSYCHO-
LOGICAL...
A DRAGON'S HEALTH DEPENDS ON THEIR MENTAL STATE.
EVERY TIME WE EXAMINE MERIELA, HER CONDITION IS WORSE THAN BEFORE,
SO IF HER MENTAL PROBLEMS ARE LEFT ALONE, IN TIME...

I WOULD BE GLAD TO HELP.
AS FOR THE SPECIFICS...
THE REASON I CAME TO YOU IS...


FOR SOME REASON
THIS WAY, YOUR HIGHNESS.
キョロキョロ
トボトボ

I FEEL UNEASY IN THE INNER PALACE DESPITE IT BEING MINE...
女性的
IS IT THE FEMININE UPHOL-STERY?
せいか…
ANYWAYS, WHAT'S CAUSED THIS MATTER?
I'VE BEEN SO BUSY SINCE I RETURNED THAT I HAVEN'T EVEN GONE TO SEE MERIELA...
HOW BAD IS HER CONDITION THAT SHE WENT TO THE WHITE DRAGON PALACE INSTEAD OF THE INNER PALACE?
AND WHAT'S WITH FARIEL AND FERIEL? DID I DO SOMETHING TO UPSET THEM?
... THERE'S SO MANY POSSIBILITIES THAT I JUST CAN'T TELL...
YOUR HIGH-NESS,
THE PRIN-CESSES ARE WAITING FOR YOU INSIDE.
OH, OKAY.
姫
WAIT... PRINCESSES?!

IT LOOKS LIKE THE GATEWAY TO HELL...
I HEARD THAT THE DRAGON PRINCESSES ARE ACTUALLY STRONGER THAN A CERTAIN SOMEONE WHO'S STILL RECOVERING...
RUNNING AWAY SEEMS LIKE THE SCARIER OPTION...
NOTHING ELSE I CAN DO...
OPEN THE DOOR.
YES.

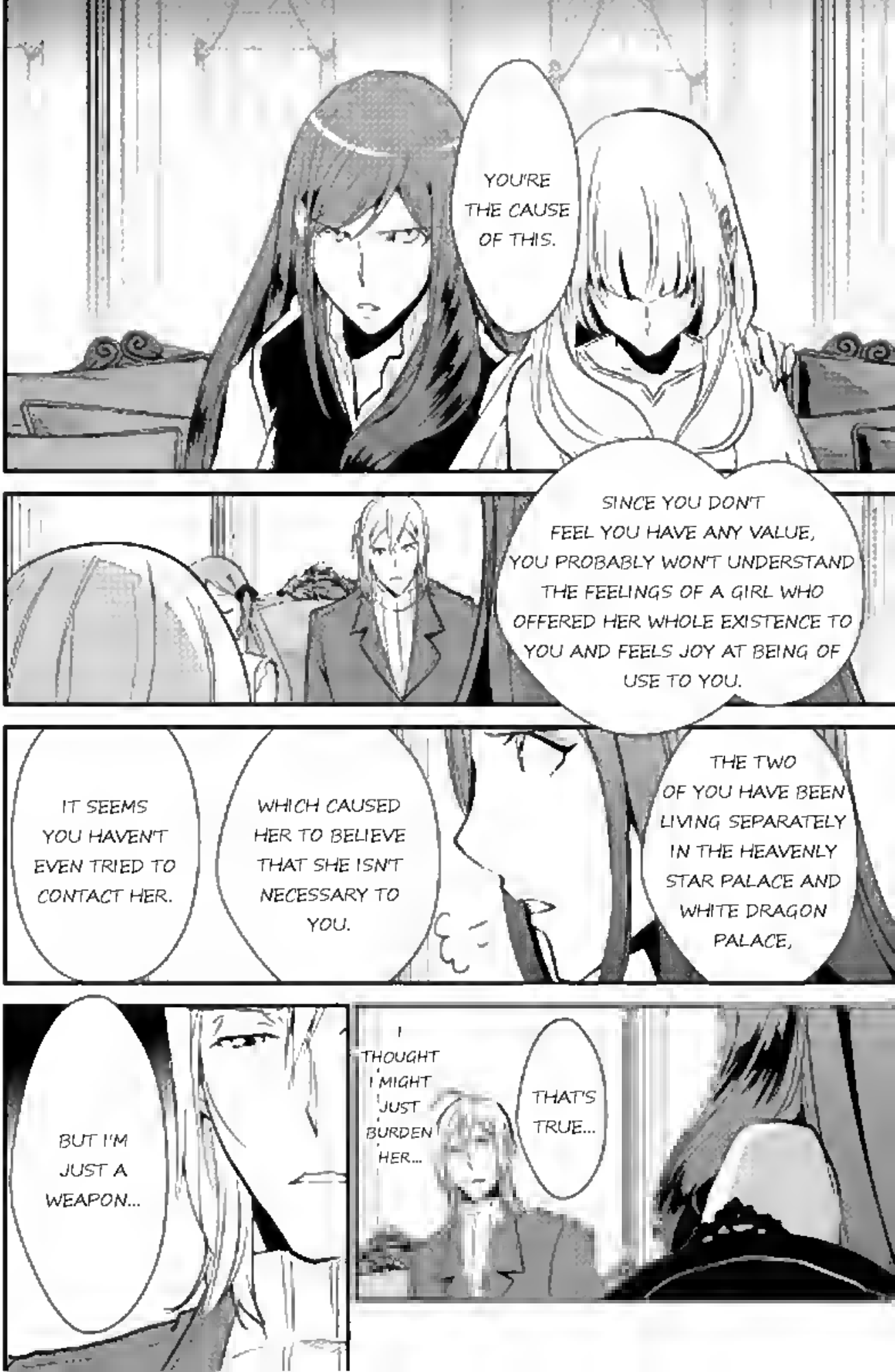
SO YOU'VE FINALLY ARRIVED, ENEMY OF ALL MAIDENS!
HUH?
RIEDE...
FARIEL AND FERIEL...
SHOULD I NOT BE HERE?
EVEN MILEIDIA?
ARIA...
LILICIA...
WH-
WHY ARE YOU ALL...
WHAT? ENEMY OF ALL MAIDENS?
MASTER LECTIVAL!
I'VE MISSED YOU!
YOU HAVEN'T LEFT YOUR OFFICE SINCE YOU RETURNED TO THE CAPITAL.

LECTIVAL, ARE YOU PERHAPS THINKING SOMETHING RUDE ABOUT YOUR BEAUTIFUL SISTER-IN-LAW?
BUT THIS SEEMS LIKE A RATHER TROUBLE-SOME SITUATION...
SHE MAY HAVE BEEN A MAIDEN BACK THEN,
.....
THERE'S NO WAY THAT COULD BE THE CASE.
ブホン ブホン
I CALLED THEM HERE.
IT'S FUN TO GATHER WITH GIRLS AROUND MY AGE.
初めて
I WAS RATHER SUR-PRISED.
ます
I DIDN'T THINK I WOULD COME TO THE INNER PALACE FOR THIS...
BUT IT IS SURPRISING THAT EVEN RIEDE AND ARIA ARE HERE...

I SEE...
THAT MAY BE THE CASE, BUT I FEEL THIS CAN ONLY END BADLY...
THEY'RE ALL COMRADES WHO HELPED TO SUPPORT YOU.
... I SWEAR...
HMPH!
NOW, NOW...
WELL THEN, LECT,
LET'S GET ON TO THE MAIN TOPIC.

MER-
LET'S ALL JUST TAKE OUR SEATS BEFORE WE GET ON TO TALKING.

I'LL BE BLUNT,
MERIELA'S CONDITION IS BAD.
IT'S A PSYCHO-LOGICAL ISSUE.
IF THIS GOES ON, IT'LL AFFECT HER FUTURE AS A WOMAN AND AS A MOTHER,
AS A DRAGON'S MENTAL STATE AFFECTS THEIR HEALTH.
WHILE I'D RATHER NOT HUMILIATE HER LIKE THIS,
.....
I WANTED TO AVOID HAVING SOMETHING SIMILAR OCCUR AGAIN IN THE FUTURE.
LECTIVAL,


YOU'RE THE CAUSE OF THIS.
SINCE YOU DON'T FEEL YOU HAVE ANY VALUE, YOU PROBABLY WON'T UNDERSTAND THE FEELINGS OF A GIRL WHO OFFERED HER WHOLE EXISTENCE TO YOU AND FEELS JOY AT BEING OF USE TO YOU.
THE TWO OF YOU HAVE BEEN LIVING SEPARATELY IN THE HEAVENLY STAR PALACE AND WHITE DRAGON PALACE,
WHICH CAUSED HER TO BELIEVE THAT SHE ISN'T NECESSARY TO YOU.
IT SEEMS YOU HAVEN'T EVEN TRIED TO CONTACT HER.
I THOUGHT I MIGHT JUST BURDEN HER...
THAT'S TRUE...
BUT I'M JUST A WEAPON...

LECT,
YOU THINK YOU SHOULD AVOID GETTING CLOSE TO OTHERS?
ONCE THE KING'S SWORD MEETS THE END OF ITS SERVICE LIFE, I'LL ALSO DISAPPEAR...
IN THAT CASE-
WE ARE HERE BECAUSE UNDERSTAND THAT AND ACCEPT IT.
ALL OF US HAVE MADE SURE TO KEEP OUR DISTANCE,
EXCEPT FOR MERIELA.

YOU MADE THE RIGHT CALL WHEN YOU DIDN'T DIRECTLY SAVE HER FROM GLORIE THEN,
BUT SHE WAS UNABLE TO SUPPORT YOU IN THE BATTLE AGAINST GLORIE.
AS SHE SHOULD HAVE BLAMED HERSELF FOR GETTING IN YOUR WAY
AND THOUGHT YOU WOULDN'T LET HER ANYWHERE NEAR DANGEROUS AREAS IN THE FUTURE.
NO, THERE'S SOMETHING ELSE AS WELL...
... THAT'S THE REASON?
HOWEVER, YOUR CONSIDERATION HAS ALREADY HURT HER BY "MAKING LIGHT" OF HER.
BECAUSE OF THAT, SHE WANTED TO SUPPORT YOU AS YOUR MOUNT BEFORE YOU GOT ENGAGED.
YOU ARE LIKE A SON OR LITTLE BROTHER WHO CAUSES TROUBLE OR A MAN WHO'LL RUN OFF SOMEWHERE IF HE'S NOT KEPT ON A LEASH.
TO HER, YOU ARE A MAN BEFORE YOU ARE THE REGENT OR CROWN PRINCE.

YOU MADE LOVE TO RIEDE OVER THERE.
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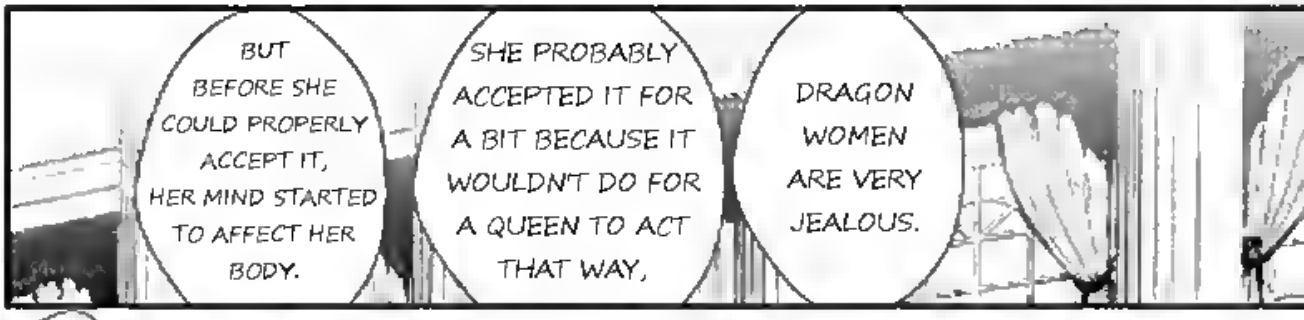

DRAGON WOMEN ARE VERY JEALOUS.
SHE PROBABLY ACCEPTED IT FOR A BIT BECAUSE IT WOULDN'T DO FOR A QUEEN TO ACT THAT WAY,
BUT BEFORE SHE COULD PROPERLY ACCEPT IT, HER MIND STARTED TO AFFECT HER BODY.

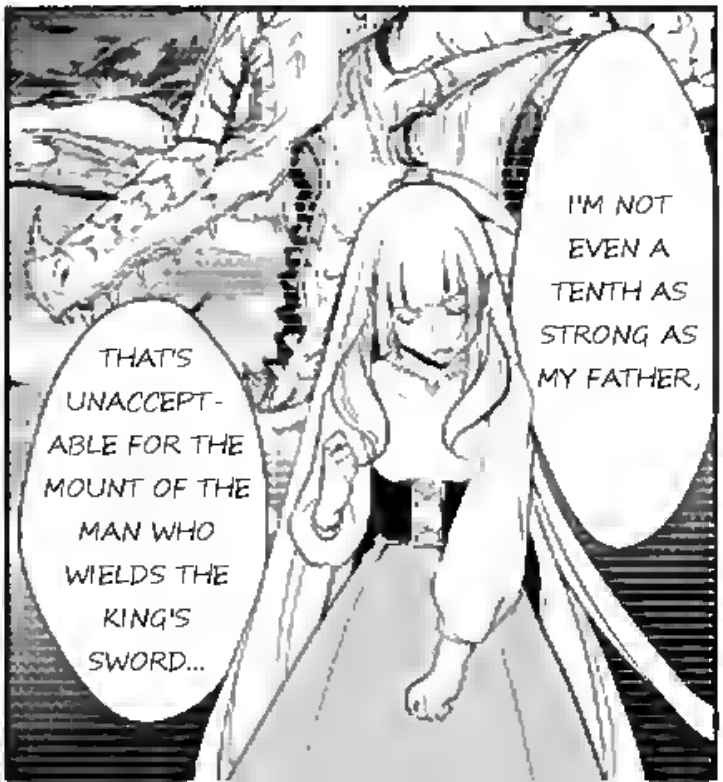
BECAUSE I GOT CLOSE TO HIS HIGHNESS,
SO...
... UM...

PRINCESS MERIELA'S ILLNESS GOT WORSE?
NO,

THIS WAS ULTIMATELY CAUSED BY THAT FOOL OF A REGENT!
WHILE IT MAY BE THE TRUTH, IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT.
EVER SINCE HE RETURNED TO THE CAPITAL, HE HASN'T GONE TO SEE HER
OR EVEN SENT A LETTER!
HE JUST DOESN'T UNDER-STAND WOMEN!
ALL HE SHOWS INSTEAD IS HALF-BAKED CONSIDERATION AND RESTRAINT!
INDEED.
ズゥーン
FARIEL'S RIGHT... IF I HAD JUST GONE TO SEE MERIELA EVERY DAY, SHE PROBABLY WOULD HAVE FOUND A PURPOSE FOR HERSELF.

LECT,
I NEVER MEANT TO MAKE LIGHT OF HER, BUT ULTIMATELY THAT'S JUST HOW IT TURNED OUT...
I...
MERIA!
NO, I HAVE TO BE THE ONE TO SAY IT!

NO ONE CAN REPLACE YOU!
I NEED YOU!
AND THERE'S NO ONE WHO CAN BE REPLACED BY YOU!
BUT


I'M NOT EVEN A TENTH AS STRONG AS MY FATHER,
THAT'S UNACCEPT-ABLE FOR THE MOUNT OF THE MAN WHO WIELDS THE KING'S SWORD...

I'M WEAK.

THEN I DON'T NEED YOU AS A MOUNT,
ーッ!!
IN THAT CASE
I'LL GO BACK TO THE WHITE-
SO

STAY WITH ME AS JUST MERIA.
BUT...
I DON'T CARE IF YOU'RE STRONG OR NOT.
IF YOU CAN'T ALLOW YOURSELF TO BE WEAK, THEN JUST BECOME STRONGER, I'LL WAIT AS LONG AS IT TAKES.

YOU CAN WORRY ABOUT IT UNTIL THEN, AND IF YOU STILL DON'T WANT TO BE WITH ME,
IT'S NOT LIKE WE CAN HOLD THE WEDDING CEREMONY WHILE THE COUNTRY IS STILL MOURNING THE KING'S DEATH.
I'LL RETURN YOU TO CARL. IF NEED BE, I'LL EVEN PREPARE A MARRIAGE FOR YOU.
WHY
IT WOULD HAVE BEEN EASIER IF YOU JUST TOLD ME TO BE A NORMAL MOUNT OR TO BECOME STRONGER...
ARE YOU GOING SO FAR FOR ME? YOU COULD JUST...
MERIA,
IT DOESN'T MATTER TO ME WHETHER OR NOT YOU'RE A MOUNT, A SOLDIER, OR A NOBLE,

I SHOULD HAVE SAID THIS SOONER.
I WANT YOU BY SIDE AS A WOMAN.
ALRIGHT,
I'LL BE SURE TO ALSO SUPPORT YOU,
I'LL SLAY A GOD OR EVEN DESTROY THE WORLD JUST TO SEE HER SMILE.
I WOULDN'T HAVE IT ANY OTHER WAY.
SO LOOK AFTER ME UNTIL ONE OF US DIES.
SORRY TO INTERRUPT YOUR LITTLE MOMENT,
I'LL EVEN DESTROY MYSELF.

IT'S NOT FAIR THAT MERIELA GETS ALL THE ATTENTION!
WH-?
WH-
HMM.
THOUGH IT IS USEFUL TO KNOW THAT LECT PREFERS WEAK WOMEN.
I SEE, SO THAT'S IT...
SIS, THAT BRUTE LIKES HIS WOMEN WEAK!
THAT REMINDS ME, I WAS WEAK BACK THEN...
I'VE FINALLY LEARNED ABOUT HIS HIGHNESS' PREFER-ENCES.
LECT,
AH.
Y-YES.
DO YOU UNDER-STAND?
YOU NEED TO PROPERLY COMMUNICATE WITH ALL OF US!

THAT REMINDS ME... I NEED TO TELL YOU ALL SOME-THING...
YOU SEE...
THERE'LL BE PRINCESSES COMING FROM THE EMPIRE AND IZUMO.
HUH?
HUH?!
WHAT?!
Y-YES?
... LECT...

NRGH!
NOT BEING ABLE TO READ THE MOOD WILL LEAD YOU TO A LOT OF PAIN.
YOU'D BEST REMEMBER THAT!

ANYWAYS, ALONG WITH YOUR APOLOGY,
I EXPECT TO HEAR YOU WHISPERING YOUR LOVE TO ME ALL NIGHT LONG!
UM... I HAVE WORK TOMORROW THOUGH...
SIS! HE TRULY IS JUST A FIEND!
I-IT SEEMS THAT WAY...
LOOKS LIKE IT'LL BE MORE LIVELY IN THE INNER PALACE.
A HUSBAND'S JOB IS TO TELL HIS WIFE HOW MUCH HE LOVES HER!
IS BEING CARELESS WITH WOMEN ONE OF THE CRITERIA WHEN PICKING A KING?
IS MASTER LECTICAL ALRIGHT?
IT SEEMS THAT'S JUST SOMETHING WE CAN'T FIX...